



The diet of the Eastern Gray Squirrels around Philpott Lake includes acorns, pine seeds, hickory nuts, walnuts, beech-nuts, maple (buds, bark), yellow poplar blossoms, apples, fungi, dogwood berries, insects, baby birds, bird eggs and amphibians. When the nut crop (mast) runs out in a particular area, the squirrels will “migrate” to a new area containing food. Squirrels usually eat twice a day—in early morning and again in late afternoon. Squirrels are active all year long and do not hibernate. Squirrels are excellent swimmers and frequently visit the islands located on Philpott Lake. When swimming, they use their large tail as a rudder. The gray squirrel also has several cousins around Philpott, including chipmunks, red squirrels, and fox squirrels.



## Ten Fast Facts About the Squirrel

1. A squirrel uses its tail for shade, as an umbrella, for balance, as a parachute, a blanket and as a rudder while swimming.
2. To alert others, squirrels “bark” or chatter when annoyed, see danger or an intruder.
3. Some people use pepper coated birdseed to discourage squirrels from raiding feeders.
4. Squirrels may live to an age of seven years.
5. Natural predators of Eastern Gray Squirrels are hawks, owls, foxes, raccoons & snakes.
6. Sometimes the squirrel will fight (& it wins) with a woodpecker over a hollow tree.
7. Adult squirrels will eat close to 3 ounces of nuts per day.
8. Male squirrels are excluded from the nest and take no part in rearing young.
9. Squirrels’ teeth grow constantly.
10. The Eastern Gray Squirrels’ Latin name “*Sciurus carolinensis*” refers to the Carolinas, where they were first recorded.

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# Eastern Gray Squirrel: Acrobat of the Trees

**Philpott Lake**







The Eastern Gray Squirrel is a frequent, often seen visitor to the Philpott area. They are found from the eastern portion of the United States to the Midwest and also in the eastern areas of Canada. Gray squirrels are bushy tailed rodents with upperparts of dark yellowish rusty color, notably on the back and head. They have gray tipped hairs on their rump, legs and sides of the neck. Their tail hairs are yellow at the base, then black and tipped with white, giving the tail a gray appearance. The squirrel's belly area is white. The gray squirrel is known as a scatterhoarder, meaning it hoards its food in many small caches and recovers it later. Some of these caches may be retrieved in hours or days, while others may not be used for months. A gray squirrel may make several thousand caches during a single year. Squirrels are very intelligent and have a very accurate memory for the location of their caches. They even use landmarks to navigate their way to their hidden food.

Squirrels are tree dwelling animals and are extremely agile when it comes to climbing and jumping. They have very acute senses of sight, smell, and hearing. Squirrels are always alert, nervous, and very wary, especially when they're on the ground. When something or someone scares a squirrel, it quickly scampers up a tree to safety. The squirrel can also run head-long down a tree as fast as it climbs one.



Squirrels usually live in a hollow tree den or in a nest. They will enter the hollow tree most often through holes created by a woodpecker.



Photo by: David Blevins



Photos by: P. Myers

A squirrels' nest is called a drey. It is usually built from leaves and twigs and placed between the forks of a tree. Nests are most often used in the spring and summer. The nest serves as a refuge, a rest area, a feeding station and occasionally as a nursery. Female squirrels usually give birth to two litters of young each year. The litters may contain from 2-7 young squirrels. After about 10 weeks, the young squirrels are basically independent.



To the dismay of homeowners, a squirrel may also build a nest in the attic or in between the walls of a house. The squirrels, in these situations, may use insulation, shredded clothing, bedding materials, etc. as building material for their nests. Homeowners may also become frustrated by squirrels raiding their bird feeders. Many tales exist of how a squirrel has stolen food from a "squirrel-proof" bird feeder.